GUDERIAN'S BEST

DESIGN NOTES

By Nigel Hodge

The Dice

Patton's best (hereafter "PB") used a base 10 dice system that generated numbers ranging from 1 to 10 or from 1 to 100. Personally, I'm not a fan of percentile systems, partly because they tend to confuse precision with accuracy. For example, a game may tell me that there's an 82% chance of hitting a target in a particular situation. That's precise, but is it accurate? Possibly not. In practice, managing all those numbers can slow game play down appreciably. Some of the tables in PB are clearly based on a two six-sided dice (2D6) system; probably lifted from research the designers did for the Squad Leader family of games. All of these considerations led me to scrap the D100 system and introduce a more user friendly 2D6 system. It took a fair bit of work tweaking some of the game mechanics, but I think it works. A few aspects of game play have been muted by the less precise dice system, but not many, and arguably they don' t affect game play to any great extent. Advocates of percentile dice can always reverse engineer my design.

Operation Barbarossa

While PB considered operations from June 1944 to May 1945, it was difficult to pick a particular part of the Russian front campaign to focus on to the detriment of others. In covering the whole operation, from 1941 to 1945 one is able to appreciate not only the development of German panzers but alto that of Russian armoured vehicles and the importance of US and British lend lease tanks. You'd probably have to be a bit crazy to attempt the entire 1941-45 campaign, but shorter campaigns are possible, as recommended in the rules, and there are of course plenty of crazy gamers out there...

Movement Boards

I do like the area design movement board of PB, but my graphical skills aren't up to duplicating that, so I used hexagons. Four different movement boards have been included in order to give more variety to play, particularly in longer campaign games. Regarding roads, most roads in Russia were not good quality, so they are, in effect, normal non-improved roads. However, as the war began to be fought in Germany and the nearby regions' roads were better. Therefore, although improved roads are not available for most of the campaign, roads in city and town boards later in the war are assumed to be improved.

Battle Board

If players wish, they can print this on coloured card to make it more pretty than the bland (and cheap) white. The 2D6 sector selection system now means that it you are less likely to have enemy units pop up behind you than in PB, but this could be explained by the fact that you are fighting less tactically flexible Russian forces, rather than Germans.

Smoke

There may have been some confusion with the original smoke rules, so now when smoke is placed on the battle board, 2 smoke markers are added. As smoke depletes, reduce the number of markers by 1.

Crew Rating / Skill

I prefer "Skill" to "Rating". The adoption of a 2D6 system has meant that in most circumstances the precise gradation of the D100 is no longer possible. Small price to pay for a faster simpler dice system, but crew skills can still make a difference, provided they reach a certain threshold (typically 8 skill points giving a +1 dice roll modifier). Some situations, such as spotting, still enable the full range of a crewman's skill to be applied.

AAMG
The externally mounted MG-34 threw less lead per second than the 0.50 cal. gun used on Shermans, so its effectiveness is slightly less. Although most late war panzers had cupola rings capable of mounting an AAMG they were not often seen in photographs; possibly because they were stored inside the turret most of the time, and possibly because they were not used as they took up precious turret space. The AAMG uses the same ammunition as the rest of the panzer's machine guns.

Fuel
I haven't included optional rules for fuel use. I have the various panzer's range date, but so far haven't met any players who actually used the optional fuel rules in PB. Later editions of the rules may include this if there is any demand for it from players.

Breakdown
panzer engine reliability deteriorated during the later years of the war, but some models, particularly Tigers, King Tigers and early (PzVId) Panthers struggled with overloaded suspension, gearboxes and transmission. As crews gained experience with the new vehicles, some of the problems eased, but this was happening at the same time as a more general reduction in the quality and availability of spare parts and material such as oil, so these effects are considered to have cancelled each other out. A breakdown roll of 2 or 3 means that an unreliable panzer is three times more likely to break down than a more reliable one (that only needs to roll 2 late in the war to break down). Given the sometimes low serviceability of some tanks it made sense to make any breakdown serious enough to affect it for the rest of the day.

Smoke Dischargers
These were fitted onto the sides of panzer turrets and fired smoke grenades forward and to the side of the panzer. I've assumed that panzers didn't carry reloads for these, though if anyone can correct me on that I'd be interested. Earlier panzers did carry various methods of creating a smoke screen such as a system for burning diesel from the engine and a box on the back of the turret in which smoke candles were able to be activated. Both of these methods tended to deposit smoke behind the panzer, and could be useful if the panzer was moving along, trailing smoke behind it, but were probably not particularly effective so they haven't been represented in the game.

NTvW System
This was actually a fairly crude system by which an S-mine, flare gun or propelled grenade could be launched from inside the panzer's turret in an attempt to kill (or, more likely, deter) infantry who were very close to the panzer. As the device couldn't be aimed, it's unlikely to have been effective as an offensive weapon, but its deterrent value is represented in the game when faced with a Russian close assault.

Pz III E & F
The 37mm armed Pz III E and Pz III F were, in game terms, identical. Some panzers were upgraded to use the 50mm L42 gun, so the E card actually represents all 37mm armed Pz III E and F types, whereas the Pz III F card represents all 50mm L42 armed Pz III E and F types.

Pz III J & K
The Pz III J & K variants were identical in game terms, so the Pz III J card represents both J and K types. Similarly, the Pz III L and Pz III M were identical in game terms, so the Pz III L card represents both L and M types.

Pz IV F & G

Some Pz IV F panzers were up-gunned to carry the 75mm L43 gun. These were often referred to as "F2". In game terms, the up-gunned F panzers were identical to the G type. Therefore, the Pz IV G card represents both up-gunned Pz IV F and Pz IV G types.

Pz IV H & J

The only difference between the Pz IV H and J, as far as I've been able to tell, is that the Pz IV J was fitted with a NTvW launcher. Given the limited effect this will have in game terms, the Pz IV H card can be used to represent both Pz IV H and Pz IV J types.

Panzer Ready Rack Storage

I have not been able to find any reliable information regarding how many rounds were carried in the turrets of various panzers, so for now I have assumed that the 8 rounds of the Sherman also applied to panzers. If anyone can assist with research on this matter it would be appreciated, with changes to be incorporated in later versions of the panzer cards. With regard to realism, it could be argued that irrespective of the actual official ready rack storage available, in practice an experienced loader would have several rounds of ammo as close to hand as possible, so a ready rack value of 8 is probably not far off the mark, whatever the internal layout of a panzer may have been.

Armour and Penetration

The armour values for various vehicles are based on armour thickness and angles. Similarly, the gun penetration values are based on how much armour the various guns were recorded as being capable of penetrating. In the real world actual penetration depended on a number of factors such as deflection, the quality of armour, and how the armour plates were attached to each other.

Attacking Enemy Infantry

In order to speed up game play I have merged the systems by which panzers hit enemy infantry and then determined if the unit was knocked out. It seems to work.

Identified Enemy Tables

These are based on how common or rare various Russian and lend lease units were. There is a bias in favour of historically uncommon units in the interest of enjoyable game play

Counters

The first versions of GB (versions 1 to 2b) had individual counters for the different Soviet units, in keeping with the original PB game. This meant, with more than 50 units, that players had to print, paste and cut out hundreds of counters. The latest version makes use of generic counters and data cards for the Soviet units. There are many advantages of this approach, not least of which is the saving involved in ink, cardboard, time and shredded fingers. It also means that modifications and additions to Soviet units are more readily implemented. If you make counters back-to-back (e.g. stick the unidentified tank onto the back of the identified tank), you can fit all of the game's counters into a single storage tray.

Nigel Hodge
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